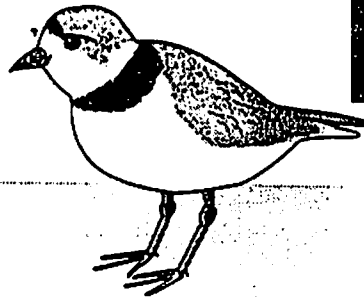


ANIMALS - BIRDS
PLOVERS

Sand shifts in favor of **plovers**

Duxbury
experiments
with
nesting
spot



• BOB MONAHAN/The Patriot Ledger

By KENDRA JOHNSON
The Patriot Ledger

About three-quarters of an acre of Duxbury Beach will be covered 9 inches deep with trucked-in sand to make the area more attractive to nesting plovers.

If the plan works, it may be possible to control where the endangered shore birds nest, keeping them away from predators and reducing conflict with people and four-wheel-drive vehicles.

The experiment, which starts this week, is believed to be the first in the state.

The idea is to cover the beach grass with sand to entice plovers to nest there. Although the grass stabilizes beach dunes, plovers prefer to nest in sand.

The plover, a tiny shore bird the color

of sand, is on the federal endangered species list.

It is illegal to kill, harm or harass the birds, and vehicles cannot drive within 300 feet of a plover chick until it is 35 days old and mature enough to fly.

Those regulations have turned many New England beaches into battlegrounds, pitting environmentalists and federal officials against four-wheel-drive vehicle owners and towns.

But the Duxbury Beach plan, which should increase plover numbers but keep them away from beach traffic and predators, has the backing of all those groups.

"We're really kind of looking at this as some-

thing that will benefit beaches everywhere," said Kay Foster of the Duxbury



■ **Plovers' range:** Lakes in interior Canada and Newfoundland south along the Atlantic Coast to Virginia. Winters on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, north regularly as far as the Carolinas.

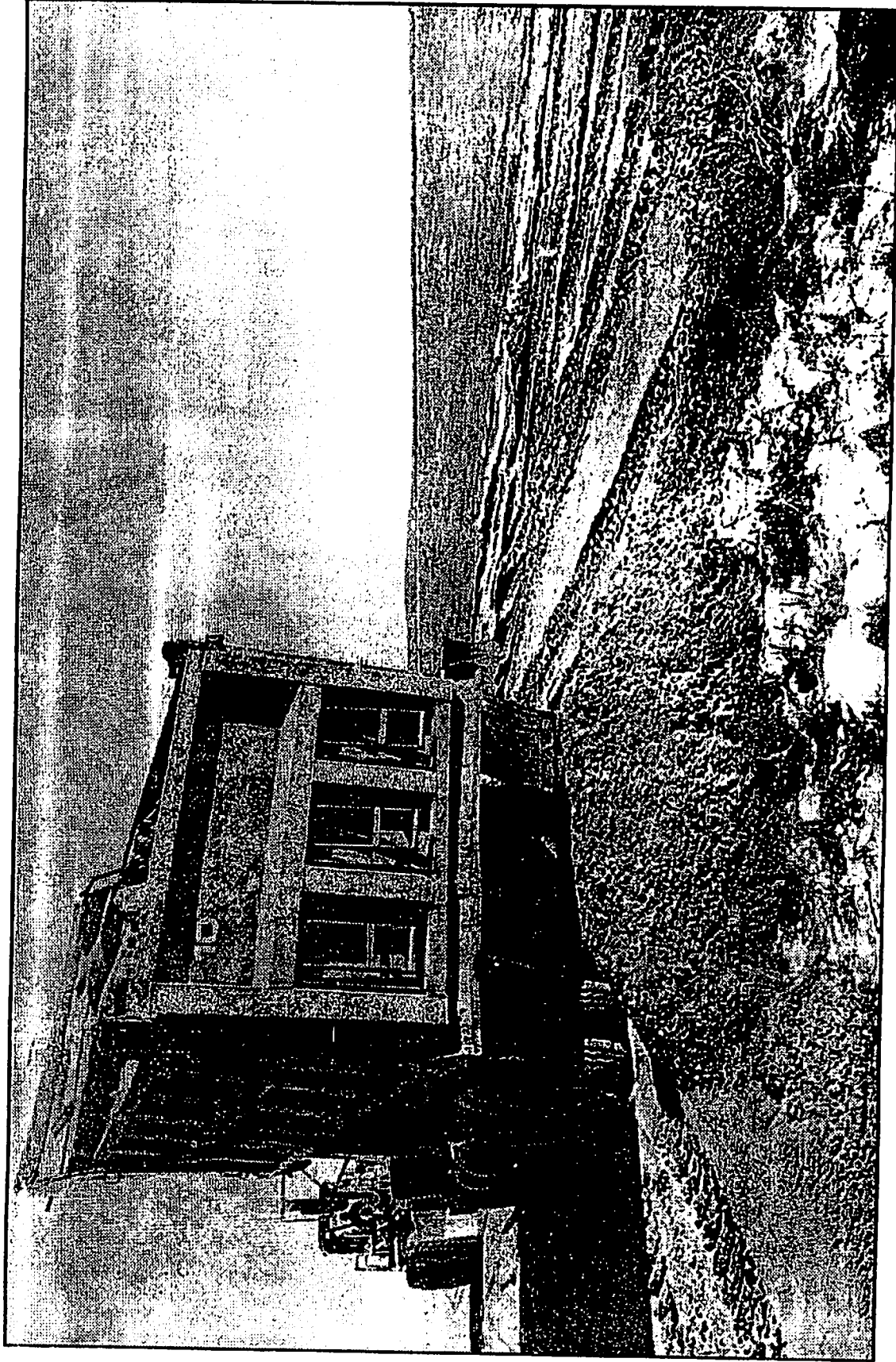
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Piping Plover

■ **Size:** 6-7".
Sparrow-sized.

■ **Habitat:** Bare, dry, sandy areas, both inland and on the coast.

■ **Nesting:** 4 buff-white eggs evenly marked with small dark spots, laid in a depression in the sand that is often lined with pebbles and bits of shells. Usually in loose colonies.



Contractors spread sand on Duxbury Beach in an effort to create a more attractive nesting area for plovers.



LISA BUL/The Patriot Ledger

Members of the Duxbury Beach Reservation hope that spreading sand on the beach will make it more attractive to nesting plovers.

Sand added to beach for birds

■ PLOVERS

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Beach Reservation.

The Duxbury Beach Reservation is a private organization that owns Duxbury Beach and leases the beach to the town each year for \$100,000.

Ryan Chandler, the endangered species officer at the town harbor-master's office, said the experiment will take place near the end of the beach on the bay side.

Reservation trustee Al Vautrinot said about 1,000 cubic yards of sand from P.A. Landers Inc. will be used for the project. He said the project will cost the Reservation \$10,000.

Landers project manager Gregory Keelan said the sand was trucked to the beach this week from the company's Mayflower plant in Plymouth.

Scott Hecker, a Duxbury resident and director of the coastal waterbird program at the state Audubon Society, believes the experiment is a first in Massachusetts.

"I think it's probably the first time in the state that anyone has agreed to put down sand and gravel specifically for the birds to nest on," he said.

Hecker said piping plovers tend to

nest on unvegetated areas of sand dunes where storms have created a berm, or shelf. This nesting environment favored by the birds lasts three to five years after a major storm.

Hecker said the bird population increases during this time, then decreases as the plants begin to grow through the sand.

Hecker said beach grass is planted to hold sand in place and decrease deterioration of the beach during a storm, but this method of slowing erosion is in direct conflict with the plovers' preferred nesting environment.

Hecker said covering the grass with sand should benefit both the birds and the beach because hiding the grass creates the nesting habitat the birds want, and adding sand lessens the damage caused by storm erosion.

"Anything that will allow us to bring more sand onto the beach is a help," Chandler said.

Vautrinot said the experiment area will be covered with about 9 inches of sand from Landers and topped off with 3 inches of natural sand from the beach so that the color of the sand on the surface is not

changed.

He said the experiment will indicate whether beach officials will be able to control the location of the birds' nesting area so they can be placed away from predators and heavy beach traffic.

"It could allow us to control where their habitat is, and by controlling where it is and providing adequate habitat for the population of birds we have out there, we might be able to even better our record for raising plovers," Vautrinot said.

Vautrinot said about 12 to 14 pairs of plovers come to Duxbury Beach each year, and Chandler said the birds lay up to four eggs each season.

The beginning of the plover season set by the state is April 1, but Chandler said the birds do not usually arrive in Duxbury until the end of April.

Chandler said the beach will not be damaged by the experiment because if the birds choose not to nest in the designated area, the grass will grow back after the birds leave.

"The nice thing is, you don't lose anything from it," Chandler said. "It sounds like a good plan. We'll see how it goes."